United Nations E/2016/SR.36

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
10 August 2016

Original: English

2016 session
24 July 2015-27 July 2016
High-level segment

Summary record of the 36th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 18 July 2016, at 9 a.m.

President: Mr. Oh Joon ..... (Republic of Korea)

Contents

Opening of the high-level segment

Agenda item 5: High-level segment

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent as soon as possible to the Chief of the Documents Control Unit (srcorrections@un.org).

Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org/).

16-12374 (E)

Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 9.05 a.m.

Opening of the high-level segment

1. **The President** declared open the high-level segment of the 2016 session of the Economic and Social Council, including the three-day ministerial meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the Council.

Agenda item 5: High-level segment

Statement by the President

2. **The President** said that the high-level segment marked the culmination of a year of intensive work by the Council under the theme for 2016 of implementing the post-2015 agenda: moving from commitments to results. The Council's role was essential for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; the year's work heralded a new beginning and reflected a higher level of expectation as to how the multilateral system would function at the global level in keeping with the vision of the 2030 Agenda.

3. The year was also highly important for the high-level political forum, which had been assigned the central role in the follow-up and review of progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda, and was meeting for the first time since the adoption of that Agenda. The world was watching to see how that precious opportunity would be used. A concerted effort was required to ensure that the high-level political forum reached its potential. Participants must take the lessons learned during the discussions back to their capitals and implement the Goals with renewed vigour.

4. The theme of the 2016 high-level political forum, namely ensuring that no one was left behind, represented the solemn promise made to the world when the 2030 Agenda had been agreed. It was a guiding principle for tackling all 17 Sustainable Development Goals and for beginning the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In order to deliver on that promise, some critical questions must be answered, notably how those furthest behind would be identified and reached, and how progress on all the Goals could be ensured, because leaving no Goal behind was as important as leaving no one behind.

5. He expressed his gratitude to the 22 Member States that would be presenting their first national voluntary reviews of the 2030 Agenda during the high-level political forum. Those peer reviews would provide a remarkable opportunity to learn valuable lessons about what had worked and to cooperate to overcome the implementation challenges encountered.

6. The high-level political forum must act as a global early warning system to ensure that States acted together and adjusted their actions where necessary in order to implement the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, whose agreement as a shared blueprint for global development was a remarkable achievement. The engagement of all stakeholders and major groups was required if the forum was to be successful, and the views and experiences of non-State actors were enriching its discussions. As the current forum set the bar for future years, he called on participants to make sure that its mandate and promise were fulfilled and to inspire each other in working together to advance achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and implement the 2030 Agenda.

Statement by the President of the General Assembly

7. **Mr. Lykketoft** (Denmark), President of the General Assembly, said that the incredible hope for the future, with which he had been filled when the General Assembly had adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, was as strong as ever. There was no other way for the world: the 2030 Agenda provided the best framework to prevent catastrophic climate change, end poverty, advance shared prosperity and secure peace and justice for all. The global humanitarian crisis, the upsurge in terrorism and violent extremism, the tragedies experienced by migrants and refugees, and the rise of populism and intolerance served not to undermine the case for the Sustainable Development Goals, but rather to strengthen it.

8. It was therefore critical that those in a position to do so proclaimed that realization of the Sustainable Development Goals was possible and that, with the right mix of political ambition, multi-stakeholder partnerships and relentless focus, it would become inevitable. The high-level political forum had a critical role to play in that endeavour by reinforcing the growing global momentum for transformation and by highlighting the institutional, technological, financial

and scientific innovations behind it. The true potential of the forum was becoming apparent. He was encouraged by the fact that 22 countries had volunteered to provide national reviews, and urged others to do likewise; he was also encouraged by the level of interest in the forum and by how inclusive and participatory many of its sessions had been.

9. It was highly appropriate to begin the era of the Sustainable Development Goals with a focus on leaving no one behind, which was a theme that resonated across the three pillars of United Nations work. It was clear that inequality, exclusion and youth unemployment were among the root causes of current threats to peace and security, and that non-discrimination and prioritizing those furthest behind were central to realizing human rights. Action across all three pillars was therefore critical to implement the Goals.

10. For Member States, the demands were clear: they must speak out against intolerance, discrimination and inequality; change the laws, institutions and policies that divided society and marginalized the most vulnerable groups and countries; tackle the impunity, corruption and global tax evasion undermining trust in politics and institutions; invest in areas that could drive more equal societies; and create the legal and regulatory frameworks that would make green investment the best investment for all.

11. There were also clear demands for the United Nations. The bureaucratic barriers within and across departments, agencies, funds and programmes must come down; greater resources needed to be dedicated to mediation, prevention and peacebuilding; and integration, collaboration and partnership must become the modus operandi of the entire United Nations system.

12. While the General Assembly had also been working to support implementation and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda, some of its discussions had not been as seamless as they perhaps should have. After the great, collective achievements of 2015, all delegations had a duty to preserve the integrity and ambition of the 2030 Agenda and focus on delivering real added value; a fully empowered, fully utilized and further improved high-level political forum would be an essential tool in that regard. It was important to remember that change at the country and community levels would and must happen in people's lives, in the economy and in the environment.

Statement by the Deputy Secretary-General

13. **The Deputy Secretary-General** noted that the 2015 forum, which had been held shortly before the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, had recognized the need to reflect on how those meeting in 2030 would assess the achievements of that Agenda. The promising start to the 2016 forum attested to the aspirations to make the high-level political forum a key factor in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

14. The international community had 15 years to deliver on its ambitious and transformative commitments: ending extreme poverty, hunger and malnutrition, the preventable deaths of newborns and children under five, and the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases; achieving universal health-care coverage and free primary and secondary education; preventing discrimination against women and girls; and transitioning to a low-carbon economy and changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production.

15. The list of far-reaching Goals and targets was long. Member States had rightly not reduced the level of ambition during the negotiations to the lowest common denominator. The probing questions set out by the President of the Council and reinforced by the President of the General Assembly were truly relevant and challenging. The international community had to deliver on the 2030 Agenda regardless of persistent challenges, new obstacles and unforeseen setbacks in the years to come, some of were already in evidence.

16. It was reassuring that so many countries had already started a serious process of implementation. Some were building on the lessons learned from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and their own experiences, and starting to integrate the new Goals into their national economic and social planning. Others were constructively and creatively setting the stage for implementation. Every country needed to accelerate the pace of implementation, since the shift from the MDGs to the Sustainable Development Goals was huge. The Sustainable Development Goals were universal, integrated, indivisible and mutually reinforcing. They required new and dynamic ways of thinking, acting, organizing, communicating and

working as a community at the national, regional and international levels.

17. Clear and credible ways of measuring and reporting progress were also required. The forum had a unique and crucial role in following up and reviewing implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Although young, it was starting to deliver, and advantage must be taken of its energy and potential. Given the complexities of its tasks, progressive adjustments would be required, particularly with regard to national voluntary reviews, and lessons must be learned from the past to ensure that follow-up and review processes would feed back into international, regional, national and local implementation.

18. All concerned must help to maintain the momentum of the transformative agenda and ensure that lessons were shared and best practices replicated. The United Nations Development Group was ensuring that the United Nations system, at the country level, supported implementation on the ground. The recent dialogue of the Economic and Social Council and input from the Independent Team of Advisors provided useful contributions to move forward in an effective and coherent manner.

19. It was important to be under no illusion — the implementation path would not be an easy one. There would be difficulties with resource mobilization; obstacles in coordination, both horizontally and vertically; uncertainties arising from climate change; fluctuations in the world economy and increased severity and frequency of disasters. Transformative leadership was required if the 2030 Agenda was to be truly transformative, and he commended the 22 countries from all regions of the world that had come forward to present the steps their Governments and societies were undertaking to implement the 2030 Agenda.

20. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals was a monumental task. There was no country in the world where all people had equal opportunities to fulfil their aspirations and dreams. Every country had poverty and inequalities to address and environmental problems to remedy. Different countries had different challenges; changes in mindset and actions were essential if the ambitious new Agenda was to be implemented effectively. The sharing of lessons, experiences and challenges, while invaluable for Governments and representatives of civil society, the private sector and the scientific community, was equally invaluable for the United Nations.

21. The United Nations system would continue to support Member States, and do its utmost to help them make a difference for people and the planet and live up to the new Agenda. It would work with Member States to progressively improve the channels for participation of multiple stakeholders. It would also help them to produce and analyse the data needed to make the right decisions for action that would reach all people, especially the vulnerable and the marginalized.

22. It was essential that no one was left behind, which was a key unifying concept of the 2030 Agenda — a message of solidarity-and the commanding theme of the 2016 forum. The challenges were great: people were living in a turbulent world, uncertainties about the road ahead were growing, and there were polarizing, inward-looking trends. At the same time, the world was full of promises and opportunities, with many working to fulfil the dreams and aspirations of their peoples. If all concerned worked together, mobilizing all good forces both within and among nations, it would be possible to achieve a better world of peace, opportunity and dignity for all.

23. *A short video on the high-level political forum on sustainable development was projected.*

Messages from the high-level political forum on sustainable development

24. **Mr. Lauber** (Switzerland), Vice-President, reporting on the outcome of the meeting of senior officials held the previous week, said that a strategic shift was required to ensure that no one was left behind. It was critical to sustain the political leadership of Heads of State and Government driving the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, to which all stakeholders — Governments, businesses and civil society — should contribute. The experience gained from the 2016 forum would be invaluable for the development of subsequent sessions and for the success of the 2030 Agenda. It was therefore time to strengthen political commitment and empower the forum to fulfil its mandate.

25. The forum had considered the annual report of the Secretary-General on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (E/2016/75), which was based on the proposed global indicator framework and provided the first account of the current global

situation relative to the 17 Goals. The report demonstrated that the broader environment was not conducive to the Goals: current economic growth rates were low; inequality was increasing; developing countries were at the end of the commodity cycle; new technologies might lead to unemployment; the risk of infectious diseases was elevated; and safety and security were in decline in many regions.

26. Against that background, there was an urgent need for disaggregated data that covered all vulnerable groups. A global effort, coordinated by the United Nations Statistical Commission, was required to improve data availability and quality in order to make informed decisions. There was a need for more capacity-building in statistics at all levels to sustain comprehensive monitoring of all aspects of the new agenda. To that end, national statistical institutes and offices needed to be strengthened.

27. Inclusion remained a challenge for both developed and developing countries. Inclusive, participatory and multi-stakeholder decision-making processes at all levels were key to safeguarding the commitments of all and ensuring that no one was left behind. The challenges to lifting people out of poverty and meeting basic needs were interconnected and must be tackled through structural changes that ensured equity and inclusion at all levels.

28. Efforts should begin with those hardest to reach, to put the most marginalized at the top of the agenda. To that end, investment in education and capacity-building, health, food security, nutrition, livelihoods and access to renewable energy would be required, as well as efforts to promote resilience to slow onset changes and shocks. A gender perspective must be taken, and a human rights-based approach should be adopted to provide access to services and implementation.

29. Decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation lay at the basis of sustainable development. Respecting planetary boundaries by increasing global resource efficiency was crucial for achieving the goal of decent work and economic growth. Including the private sector in that process was key in achieving a sustainable economy. Sustainable agricultural practices, adequate climate policies, healthy oceans and terrestrial ecosystems were fundamental to support the most vulnerable in achieving food security. All stakeholders from local governments to groups with special needs must be involved in those efforts.

30. Noting the importance of women's economic empowerment and participation at all levels of political, economic and public life, and the need to eliminate discrimination, violence and unlawful and harmful practices against women, he said that gender aspects should be mainstreamed into the strategies and plans for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and for a gender data revolution.

31. A revitalized global partnership was required to achieve the ambitious global agenda. An international economic environment, which sustainably harnessed international private business and finance, development cooperation and trade, and which gave special attention to the needs of those furthest behind, would help to overcome challenges in mobilizing means of implementation. The pursuit of equitable tax systems and efforts to tackle illicit financial flows and harmful corporate profit shifts were fundamental in order to avoid undermining the mobilization of financial means of implementation.

32. The Technology Facilitation Mechanism, its annual multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation and the online platform were all important tools for supporting national and local implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition to North-South transfers, South-South cooperation was also of fundamental importance in maximizing the benefits from science, technology and innovation.

33. The annual science-policy interface, which sought to identify new and emerging issues, should reflect on the outcomes of an inclusive process involving a wide variety of scientists, knowledge generators (including on traditional knowledge), and policymakers.

34. Lastly, the *Global Sustainable Development Report 2019* should address emerging issues, as well as key bottlenecks for implementation from a scientific perspective, with a view to informing policymakers.

35. **Mr. Palma Cerna** (Honduras), Vice-President, reporting on some of the other issues addressed at the meeting of senior officials, said that the need to translate global awareness of the 2030 Agenda into action at the national level had been discussed. In order to create ownership of the Sustainable Development

Goals and of their interlinkages, it was important to build on national and local circumstances, values and cultures, and to avoid the use of predefined blueprints. A particular focus at the grass-roots level on vulnerable groups was essential; the media and education for sustainable development had a crucial role to play in that regard. Transparency and accountability were recognized as fundamental principles for the implementation of the Goals.

36. Regarding mainstreaming the Sustainable Development Goals into national policies, plans and strategies, and integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development, it was pointed out that implementation of the 2030 Agenda depended on the ability to integrate the global framework into national and subnational plans. The importance of enhancing policy coherence across sectors was highlighted, as was the need to use all available governance tools and instruments to incorporate the Goals into policies, programmes and institutions at the different levels of government.

37. With regard to vertical cooperation for achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, emphasis was placed on the critical role of local and subnational governments that were at the forefront in tackling most issues and had the legitimacy to ensure a people-centred approach to development. However, local and subnational authorities were often not properly taken into account in policy development at the national level. More work on the connection between the local and international levels was also required.

38. With regard to multi-stakeholder engagement, the importance of the participation of all stakeholders in decision-making was highlighted. Civil society had a critical role to play in advancing the 2030 Agenda, including by creating platforms for monitoring. It was noted that many companies had begun to examine the impact of the Goals on their businesses and to integrate them into their plans, including through the development of indicators.

39. A global effort was required to improve data quality and availability in order to evaluate progress and make informed decisions. While data for follow-up and review was important, data for monitoring, planning and management was also critical. Particular attention was required to avoid increasing the reporting burden on countries and to make full use of existing reporting mechanisms. National reviews should be robust, voluntary, effective, participatory, inclusive, transparent and integrated with other follow-up review activities. They should include disaggregated data and reflect bottom-up evaluation processes as well as inputs produced at the subnational level. Once the first set had been submitted, it would be important to consider where gaps remained and how such reviews could be even more beneficial to the international community in the future.

40. With regard to delivery for small island developing States, it was recognized that the content of the 2030 Agenda was well aligned with that of the SIDS Accelerated Modalities for Action (SAMOA) Pathway and the two instruments should be perceived as mutually supportive. Climate change was highlighted as a central concern for small island developing States, and action on climate change mitigation by all countries would be critical for their existence. Financing and resource mobilization remained a challenge in small island developing States; the high vulnerability of those States to natural disasters should be taken into account when considering their graduation from the category of least developed countries. Furthermore, as commonly used indicators might not reflect the reality of the challenges facing very dispersed populations, indicators adapted to the circumstances of small island developing States might be drawn up.

41. Special consideration should be given to countries in special situations or in conflict and post-conflict situations. Their success would depend largely on a strengthened global partnership, including capacity-building, technology transfer, technical and financial support, trade facilitation and international cooperation to combat illicit financial flows.

42. Commitments in terms of official development assistance had to be met. It was noted that, while many middle-income countries had experienced great economic benefits in recent decades, they continued to face challenges and were fearful of falling into the middle-income trap.

43. Regional organizations and initiatives, which provided an important platform for addressing regional priorities and challenges, mobilizing collective action and addressing transboundary issues, were critical in integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into national development plans and for strengthening the

capacity of Governments to implement the 2030 Agenda. It was noted that regional forums on sustainable development, which had been established in all regions where regional commissions existed, were already playing an active role in mobilizing action on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Statement by the Prime Minister of Norway

44. **Ms. Solberg** (Norway), Prime Minister, and Co-Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Advocates, said that pressing economic, social and environmental issues, which affected all people irrespective of where they lived, must be tackled and that special attention should be given to marginalized groups in the most fragile settings.

45. The Sustainable Development Goals, which were universal, spoke directly to the root causes of what was broken in the world and would only be achieved by working together. Ownership of all the Goals, not only by leaders but also by all citizens, was essential to mobilize the extra effort required. To that end, the consultation processes with relevant stakeholders around the world should continue, as should efforts to develop awareness and knowledge; she noted that the Goals were to be included in school curricula in Norway. The business sector was taking ownership, as a growing number of companies sought to align their business strategies with the Goals, and the 22 countries that had volunteered to submit national reviews were demonstrating government ownership.

46. If tangible steps were to be taken to make the world more sustainable, leadership had to be shown by all countries and at all levels of society. Noting the existence of several early examples of leadership within the private sector, she said that the bipartisan parliamentary forum on the Sustainable Development Goals in the Republic of Korea provided a good example of political leadership. Political leaders needed to translate political will into legislation, policies and concrete plans, which must be financed and implemented. She highlighted the importance of domestic revenue generation and good management of existing resources in that regard, and of international development aid to ensure that no one was left behind.

47. International solidarity had to be built. In many areas, business as usual would not be sufficient, and new and innovative partnerships involving businesses, civil society organizations and academia were required in order to identify efficient and sustainable solutions at the local, national and global levels. The well-established Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization was a good example of an international, cross-sectoral partnership that should serve as inspiration for the development of new partnerships; imagination was the only limiting factor.

48. The Sustainable Development Goals would put the world on a different and sustainable path and provided a road-map to the future. Their achievement was the most important task for the current generation.

Statement by the Vice-President of Viet Nam

49. **Ms. Dang** Thi Ngoc Thinh (Viet Nam), Vice-President, said that the first year of implementing the 2030 Agenda had highlighted the significance of strong political will on the part of Member States and the United Nations system. However, a paradigm shift in development thinking was equally important. First, a holistic and multidimensional approach was required to address the challenges of sustainable development. Second, the Sustainable Development Goals could only be achieved successfully in an environment of peace and security and on the basis of respect for international law. Third, the participation and contribution of all relevant stakeholders — Governments, communities and the people — were essential if the benefits of sustainable development were to reach the most vulnerable.

50. The Sustainable Development Goals must be integrated into the development strategies and policies of all nations. International cooperation and support from developed to developing countries were indispensable for the successful implementation of all the Goals. The theme of leaving no one behind reflected the resolve of the international community in turning global commitments, such as those enshrined in the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, into action to achieve concrete outcomes.

51. If that ethical imperative was to be achieved, support would have to be given to the disadvantaged and less fortunate, and justice instituted in society. Leaders and decision makers could develop policies and create an enabling environment to eliminate inequalities so that the most vulnerable could receive

protection and care and develop their potential. At the global level, efforts should be made to establish equality of opportunity, and developed nations should contribute to creating a peaceful international environment and supporting developing countries in finance, technology and capacity-building.

52. Viet Nam had done its utmost to move forward. The comprehensive reforms implemented since 1986 had brought about major changes in the country, including a decrease in the poverty rate from 60 per cent in 1986 to less than 4.5 per cent in 2015. The Sustainable Development Goals were currently being integrated into socioeconomic development strategies and plans. In her country, people were considered as the driving force for development. While equal rights for all citizens were provided for in the Constitution and legal system, special projects and programmes were in place for vulnerable groups, including two national target programmes to narrow the gaps between urban and rural areas. Much remained to be done however, and the recent, sluggish economic growth was making implementation of the Goals a particular challenge.

53. Viet Nam looked forward to hearing about the experiences of other countries, which it hoped would generate new ideas and innovative solutions to strengthen the work of the United Nations. She trusted that the support and assistance Viet Nam had received from the United Nations over previous years, for which it was grateful, would continue, and that the United Nations, and in particular the Council, would play a leading role in helping Member States to implement the 2030 Agenda.

The meeting rose at 10.10 a.m.